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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 001962

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - SECURITY MINISTER ON MOGADISHU, HIRAAN,  
AND TFG POLITICS

Classified By: Counselor for Somalia Affairs Bob Patterson for reasons  
1.4(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: TFG Security Minister Abdullahi Ali "Sanbaloshi" confirmed to us that there are joint TFG and AMISOM plans to mount an offensive in Mogadishu, but he doubted that would occur by September 20, as advertised. "Sanbaloshi" estimated that al-Shabaab had 4000 - 5000 troops in Mogadishu, and said reports of a 1000 or less were standard underestimates. He said the TFG had approximately 4000 troops, including newly-trained troops expected to arrive soon from Djibouti. An additional 850 aging, Siad Barre-era soldiers were awaiting weapons, and would contribute to the offensive, "Sanbaloshi" predicted. "Sanbaloshi" expressed doubts about Hiraan TFG police commander Hussein Mukhtar Afrah's abilities and trustworthiness. He mooted the possibility the TFG would name a well-know Hiraan native, now living in Italy, as Hiraan's governor and asked for USG help in paying TFG-allied troops in the region. "Sanbaloshi" was optimistic that al-Shabaab would be defeated in Juba and Gedo. He lamented the distractions of petty internal TFG politics. End summary.

#### Mogadishu Offensive

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12. (C) We met with Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Security Minister Abdullahi Ali "Sanbaloshi" on September 16 to discuss the security situation in Mogadishu and in key regions. The situation in Mogadishu was "difficult," he said. He estimated that al-Shabaab forces numbered 4000 - 5000 in Mogadishu, rejecting other reports of 1000 or less as underestimates. (Note: "Sanbaloshi's estimate seems high to us. End note.) African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM) and TFG preparations for a breakout offensive against al-Shabaab tentatively scheduled for September 20 were going slowly. AMISOM was concerned about potential problems in distinguishing non-uniformed TFG troops and allied militias during combat. The TFG was concerned in turn about the commitment of some of its "front line" militia to hold any captured territory. The TFG was anxiously anticipating the arrival of Djiboutian- and French-trained recruits to bolster TFG and allied forces, which would then number approximately 4000 troops.

13. (C) To bolster the offensive and help hold captured ground, "Sanbaloshi" said the TFG was replacing some company-level commanders and planning logistics. In addition to the hoped-for 4000 troops, it was preparing roughly 850 Siad Barre-era military soldiers now gathering at a camp in Mogadishu's Jazeera area, immediately west-southwest of the

international airport. These troops were not yet armed, but "Sanbaloshi" said the TFG was, with difficulty, attempting to equip them. These "grey troops" as Prime Minister Sharmarke has called them, will be charged with holding key, newly-captured locations if the breakout offensive succeeds.

#### TFG Has problems in Hiraan Region

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14. (C) "Sanbaloshi" told us that TFG Hiraan regional force commander Police General Hussein Mukhtar Afrah was "not in control" of the situation in Hiraan. Mukhtar was aloof, not sufficiently popular, and did not have the political gravitas to unite the region. "Sanbaloshi" said that he did not fully trust Mukhtar. The TFG had sent \$80,000 to Mukhtar and then-Hiraan governor Abdirahman Ma'ow for Hiraan troops and for goodwill gestures in and around Beledweyne. Both men had misappropriated the funds, "Sanbaloshi" said, and only \$16,000 in the end reached Mukhtar's troops. (Note: Mukhtar has told us the TFG only sent \$16,000, all of which he spent on his troops. End note.) Ma'ow reportedly met with al-Shabaab leaders Mukhtar Robow and Abu Zubeyr "Godane" shortly after receiving the money, and has since resigned from the government.

15. (C) "Sanbaloshi" said Ma'ow was publicly questioning why Hiraan's sons should battle al-Shabaab while no other TFG forces were on the offensive. "Sanbaloshi" conceded that this message was resonating in Hiraan because the TFG has been absent from, and largely silent about Hiraan. When we asked why the TFG had not traveled to Hiraan, "Sanbaloshi"

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said the government had nothing to offer there. He thought an empty-handed TFG delegation would only further discredit the government and validate Ma'ow's criticism. "Sanbaloshi" agreed that public statements of praise for those resisting in the regions was useful, but could only do so much. He asked for U.S. assistance in making salary payments to troops in the regions.

16. (C) "Sanbaloshi" said that the TFG hoped that the appointment of a new governor for Hiraan might help. The government was considering Hassan Ali Queyflow, a well-known former Mogadishu police commissioner still popular in Hiraan, but living now in Italy. Queyflow is from Ma'ow's Hawiye/Hawadle subclan, and could challenge Ma'ow locally and among the Hawadle diaspora. Mukhtar would remain the TFG ground commander, and would be expected to defer to Queyflow, his senior in age and in status.

#### Optimistic about Juba and Gedo

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17. (C) Turning to the Juba region, "Sanbaloshi" said Ras Kamboni militia leader Ahmed Madobe's uprising against al-Shabaab could succeed. "Sanbaloshi" reported that the most important Ogadeni and Marehan militia leaders in Juba and Gedo were on board. Juba's population may need to hear Ras Kamboni political leader Hassan al-Turki bless the initiative. To counter the Ogadeni effort, al-Shabaab is preparing itself, in part by recruiting Marehan militias in and around Kismayo, and by preying on natural Marehan insecurities about Ogadeni domination of the port. "Sanbaloshi" thought that the Ethiopian government was not of one mind about the Juba/Gedo offensive. He guessed that some in the GOE would have concerns about Ogadeni control of Kismayo.

#### Internal Politics Petty and Distracting

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18. (C) "Sanbaloshi" said that the recent cabinet reshuffle was largely ineffective. It had succeeded only in angering demoted ministers and their clans. Recent parliamentary criticism (mostly by Dir and Rahanweyne MPs) of the Prime

Minister would persist, but would go nowhere. It was a needless distraction for a government already overwhelmed by the crisis facing it, "Sanbaloshi" said. Contradicting rumors, he said he had seen absolutely no evidence of a rift between President Sheikh Sharif and the Prime Minister.

Comment

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19. (C) "Sanbaloshi" seemed to doubt the rumored Mogadishu offensive tentatively slated for September 20 would start on time. His intention to travel to Washington for ten days beginning September 20 seemed evidence of his skepticism. It is certain that any Mogadishu offensive will rely heavily on AMISOM support. The TFG's waning influence in Hiraan is regrettable, and "Sanbaloshi" didn't seem to accept what the regional leaders have told us: that even in the absence of financial or material support, TFG public support and encouragement was still a powerful motivator.

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